Programs and Services

Farm and Food Report, Week of April 17, 2006

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LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS HARVEST EFFICIENCY DURING GRAZING

Making the best use of one's grazing resources is always top-of-mind in the livestock production world. As a result, a few producers have started to intensively manage their pastures during summer grazing, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist Lorne Klein.

They're doing that by moving their electric fences at intervals of two days or less.

"This level of management tends to happen in the higher rainfall areas of the province where forage production is relatively high," say Klein. "It also tends to be done by producers grazing large numbers of livestock in a single group: for example, where there are between 300 to 600 steers, or 250 cow/calf pairs. In these cases, the time and cost of intensive management can be economically feasible."

Klein explains that not all of the grass or forage produced on a pasture is actually consumed by the grazing animals. As grazing periods become longer, more forage is wasted due to manure-fouling, trampling and camping. The percentage of a pasture's production that is consumed by livestock is called the utilization rate.

Research shows that, in a continuous season-long grazing system, only 35 to 50 per cent of the forage grown in a season is actually consumed by grazing livestock. During three- to four-day grazing periods, however, utilization can be increased to 65 to 70 per cent, and grazing periods of two days or less can achieve utilization rates of 85 to 90 per cent.

"These utilization rates represent a significant difference in harvest efficiency," Klein points out. "For example, suppose a perennial forage grass/legume stand produces 3,000 pounds per acre through the growing season. A utilization rate of 45 per cent would result in 1,350 pounds per acre being grazed. A utilization rate of 70 per cent would result in 2,100 pounds per acre being grazed."

For comparison purposes, a group of animals could be grazed on 103 acres rather than 160, he adds.

"This represents a significant difference in land requirements, and is one of the reasons why producers are adopting management-intensive grazing systems more and more," Klein concludes.

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Week of April 17, 2006

SASKATCHEWAN ATTRACTS ALBERTA'S ASPIRING LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

The current wave of Alberta residents moving to Saskatchewan, where agricultural land is more affordable, does not show any sign of waning, if one judges by the rewards the Last Cattle Frontier initiative is reaping in east-central Saskatchewan.

Gord Bulmer is the General Manager of the Good Spirit Regional Economic Development Authority (REDA) in Yorkton. His organization has joined forces with the Yellowhead REDA in Langenburg and the South Parkland REDA to lure Albertans to Saskatchewan's "Next Best West," by visiting them and extolling the virtues of buying land in Saskatchewan.

"Each of the three REDAs had to chip in $3,000, and the province matched that with another $9,000," explains Bulmer, and to have a good lure piece on hand, he and his colleagues solicited advertising for a supplement produced by the Yorkton This Week and Enterprise.

Individuals who lived in the area and who wanted to list their property could place a free advertisement in supplements put out by Yorkton This Week or The Melville Advance. The cost of the ad was picked up by the three REDAs.

"We had over 100 listings from private individuals from the Yorkton area alone. We took the Yorkton This Week supplement with us and we dropped it on the table when we were out doing our presentations. We are talking about well over 100,000 acres. Every listing was for at least one quarter; most were for five or six. In addition to that, several of the realtors took advantage of the opportunity and paid for their own advertising in the same section."

Does it bother Bulmer to have so much land for sale in this area?

"Not at all. Would it bother Esso to make a discovery and find out they have another billion barrels hidden in the ground? I don't think so. I think they would be quite happy. What we have here is just a lot of opportunity."

Asked about the results of the campaign so far, Bulmer answers: "One realtor in our area closed seven deals that originated from the trip we made a year ago last January. Seven ranch families are moving to our area. It has been a success, and it is snowballing. Two weeks ago, I received another unsolicited call from an Alberta realtor who couldn't keep up with the local demand for ranch properties and so was directing them to our region. It is now getting a momentum of its own."

The Last Cattle Frontier project specifically targets young farm families who are just starting off in livestock production. The influx of young children helps out the local school.

This year, it was the turn of Michelle Andrews, the Yellowhead REDA's Agri-Business Project Manager in Langenburg, to be Alberta bound.

"In late January, we hosted seminars in Fort McLeod, Olds and Vermillion," she says. "We spoke to over 250 people. I was amazed at the number of people who were looking into coming to Saskatchewan. The first seminar was mostly first-time lookers, taking up the idea to see what we had to offer. At the other two meetings, people had investigated the possibility already. They were looking at confirmation of what was out here. Some of them were looking at southwestern Saskatchewan, and with us coming, they wanted to see what the east-central area could offer. It was amazing that people were already thinking of coming over."

Andrews says the initiative has generated a lot of media coverage in Alberta communities, which also contributed to raising the profile of Saskatchewan livestock production opportunities.

It seems it pays to go boldly and to show Albertans the way to the Last Cattle Frontier.

To find out more about the initiative, visit: http://lastcattlefrontier.com/

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CROP INSURANCE COVERAGE INFORMATION FOR CHICKPEAS

More Saskatchewan producers may be considering large Kabuli chickpeas as part of their 2006 seeding plans, given the attractive current market prices. Experienced producers have had success growing this management-intensive crop, but it is anticipated that additional acres will be seeded this year by less experienced growers.

If you do not have experience growing chickpeas, starting with a small number of acres is advised, with a thorough review of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance's terms and conditions applied to chickpea insurance. Crop Insurance has consulted with industry experts to develop these terms and conditions, which will be mailed to all customers who endorsed chickpeas in 2006.

"I encourage any first-time growers, or growers who feel they are not familiar with the terms and conditions, to consult them online or contact their customer service office for a copy," said Saskatchewan Crop Insurance agrologist Chris Stewart. "Staff can address any coverage questions you may have."

Some important considerations that could affect your liability include the use of high quality seed, required to produce a good crop. Some relatively high quality seed was produced in 2005, but there are also significant amounts with problematic germination and disease levels. Customers must provide a sample of their seed for verification prior to the processing of any claims.

Ascochyta levels on the seed must not exceed 0.3 per cent as it is ready to go in the ground (after cleaning and application of any seed treatment).

"If requested, the lab will test your seed using a fungicide treatment to reduce disease. However, you must ensure you can achieve the same level of seed coverage and disease control with your equipment, or any custom application equipment. Keep in mind that Kabuli chickpea seed must be treated to control Pythium," Stewart points out.

"Because of the rapid and devastating nature of Ascochyta, you must monitor the crop closely from the time of emergence. Adequate control measures must be implemented at the earliest possible detection of the disease. Multiple fungicide applications may be required."

Chickpeas seeded more than once in four years on the same land will not be eligible for insurance.

May 21 is the final seeding date that liability that will be accepted in areas with the latest possible first fall frost. Coverage may be reduced or denied in areas where chickpeas are seeded too late to reasonably expect to mature.

Customers who are considering or have decided to stop crop monitoring or taking control measures are asked to contact their Crop Insurance customer service office to discuss the crop's condition and all insurance implications.

To find out more about chickpea production, please visit the following links:

Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Chickpea Terms and Conditions
Chickpea in Saskatchewan (SAF)
Guidelines for Seed-Borne Diseases of Pulse Crops - 2006 (SAF)
Guidelines for Disease Scouting and Foliar Fungicide Applications for Ascochyta Blight in Chickpea in Saskatchewan (SAF)

For more information on chickpea production in Saskatchewan, call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377. For

details on chickpea coverage, contact Saskatchewan Crop Insurance at 1-888- 935-0000.

For more information, contact:

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SASKATCHEWAN POULTRY SECTOR ON THE LOOKOUT FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

While there is always a risk that avian influenza A (H5N1) may come to Saskatchewan in the future, steps are already in place to control the impact the discovery of any infected animals would have on the Saskatchewan poultry sector, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Disease Surveillance Veterinarian Dr. Mary VanderKop.

"We know that avian influenza A has made its way to waterfowl in Europe, and that North American and European ducks and geese have migratory patterns that intersect, so, in theory, there is a risk of transmission, but the poultry industry is extremely well protected because commercial birds are raised in confined barns," VanderKop says.

"It is perhaps more at locations where geese and ducks are raised outdoors that cross-infection might occur. Wild ducks and geese may share ponds, and the disease may be transmitted in these circumstances to domestic ducks and geese that might, in turn, transmit it to free-ranging chickens."

In the event an animal became ill and died as a result of avian flu, provincial authorities are in an ideal position to detect it right away because the province co-funds the Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS) laboratory, in co-operation with the University of Saskatchewan. PDS tests animals submitted by veterinarians to determine the cause of death. It would find out if avian flu were to blame, says VanderKop. If the PDS suspected that it found the highly infectious strains of avian flu, it would have to report it to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), which has authority to quarantine and eradicate the disease. Therefore, the risk of it spreading in Saskatchewan is very minimal, especially to humans.

Current evidence suggests that the most likely means of transmitting the virus to people is close human contact with live infected birds. There is no evidence to suggest that the consumption of cooked poultry or eggs could transmit the avian flu to humans. All the evidence to date indicates that thorough cooking will kill the virus.

"The cases of transmission in developing countries that we hear about in the news are attributed to close contact, including allowing chickens to live in the house during the winter months," she says.

The CFIA advises poultry operations to rigorously follow current guidelines to prevent avian influenza from spreading. It reminds producers that vehicles, equipment and clothing can carry the avian influenza virus. As a general practice, poultry owners should strictly limit access to their premises. If visitors must enter, poultry producers must take the following biosecurity precautions:

Provide visitors with clean coveralls or other clothing which they must wear for the duration of their visit.

Clean these clothes daily using normal laundering practices.

Require all visitors to wash their hands before entering the barns.

Provide all visitors with clean footwear to wear for the duration of their visit. If this is not feasible, footwear must be thoroughly cleaned of all debris with soap and water followed by disinfectant. As an added precaution, footbaths containing disinfectant should be placed at the entrance of poultry houses to clean entering and exiting footwear.

Place a standard pump sprayer containing disinfectant at the entrance to the property, and require all visitors to thoroughly spray their vehicles – particularly the tires, wheel wells and undercarriage – before entering the premises.

The CFIA advises poultry producers to ensure all equipment brought onto their premises is clean. To further protect against the spread of avian influenza, equipment should be sprayed with disinfectant.

As for the risk of transmission through egg or animal consumption, Health Canada says that, while unlikely, transmission of the virus to humans via the consumption of uncooked or undercooked eggs or poultry cannot be completely ruled out. To limit potential risks, poultry and eggs should be thoroughly cooked to kill any possible viruses or bacteria.

Proper safe food handling practices, such as handwashing and keeping poultry and egg products separate from other food products to avoid cross contamination, should be followed. This is consistent with long standing advice from Health Canada and other health authorities throughout the world.

The bottom line is keep following the procedures that are already in place.

To find out more, visit the special Pandemic Influenza website established by the Government of Canada at: http://www.influenza.gc.ca/index_e.html, or Saskatchewan Health's Public Pandemic Preparedness Influenza Plan at http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/.

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PESTICIDE SAFETY TRAINING FOR EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

This may not be the first thing that comes to mind to producers whose spraying equipment malfunctions in the field, but it sure matters to the service technicians who are called upon to fix the problem.

What sort of precautions do they need to take when they are bringing in a sprayer?

The Saskatchewan Institute of Sciences and Technologies (SIAST) now offers a program for the workplace that can help ensure safety risks are minimized, according to David Warnock, Instructor of Agricultural Programs at SIAST.

"We have done machinery operation and maintenance training for students here, and we have dealt with machinery dealers in the cities. Staff at one of the local dealerships, who indicated they do a fair bit of repairs on high-clearance sprayers, approached us. Some of them were a little nervous about dealing with some of these machines after they had been out in the field. Sometimes, they would even come in with some pesticide in them and they wouldn't know how to handle it. They needed to find out what the risks were, and what the best procedures would be to observe when working on the equipment," Warnock says.

"So, we staged a one-day workshop where an instructor from here goes to the dealership and goes through some of the basic information related to pesticides. They discuss some of the hazards and which products are of particular concern, and how to deal with them; things like the type of clothing that would be appropriate, what work practices would be worth considering, and even what to do if someone was accidentally exposed, or if there was a spill."

Warnock says the program is customized in the sense that the instructor spends time working with the staff—looking at their particular facility and planning a kind of workplace program that would help them know how to deal with situations, and what they should do based on their facility and their surroundings.

"We did this with one facility in Saskatoon last year, one in Regina and one in Yorkton. We do it on a cost-recovery basis. We charge so much for a day. It relates to the Pesticide Applicator Certification training that we do. We use some of the material we use for that course as a resource, and we are certainly prepared to do it more than we have been, if people are interested," Warnock says.

"What often happens with a sprayer that breaks down in the field is that it could even have product still in it. It is contaminated externally because of the spray drift and dust on the wet parts of the equipment. So when it gets into the workplace, staff need to clean it properly and then they ask, what do you do with the contents left in the sprayer?"

Warnock explains that, when machine components are removed for replacement or repair, quite often there is some spillage from what is in the line.

"So just deciding what resources the technicians can call upon to contain this material is of crucial importance. How do they dispose of the pesticide? How do they protect themselves when handling the equipment?

"The most important precautions are to wear the proper protective clothing, to have good personal sanitation, and to have a shower facility in the workplace."

Many mechanics who come from a farm background understand the importance of precautions when handling pesticides, but that is not always the case for everyone.

"They really appreciate knowing what the risks are, first of all, and knowing how to deal with them—how not to put themselves at risk. At one location, there were a couple of employees who had been fairly significantly poisoned in the past and had been off work for a day or two at least, and perhaps longer. That made them realize how important it was to know the risks and how to handle them."

Accidental poisoning is dangerous. Anything from mild symptoms, like headaches, dizziness and nausea, to actually being laid up for a time are real possibilities.

"It is a great program. We know it; the mechanics know it," says Warnock. "It gives them confidence in going to their employers and saying, 'Maybe we need to spend some money to make the workplace safe.' Employers, who themselves might not be aware of what can happen, appreciate discovering what the best practices are. In one workplace, they changed some of their policies and now refuse to bring in machinery that has product in the tank. They require that it be washed down in the field so they don't bring all this stuff into the shop."

To bring in an instructor and access the program in your workplace, call SIAST at (306) 798-6310 or 798-0456.

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